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ABSTRACT

A compilation of statewide results of a performance measurement survey using the DeProspo/Altman model is presented. The survey measures books and periodical availability; analyzes questions asked and the degree of user satisfaction with services; measures in-house use of both materials and equipment; and identifies availability of staff. Extreme and median figures for all categories, and comparable figures from DeProspo's larger surveyed libraries, where available, are given. Some immediate interpretations indicate types of users and usage of individual libraries. This report is primarily intended as an aid to assist participating libraries by making available results from other libraries of a comparable size. (Author)

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PERFORMANCE MEASURES IN RHODE ISLAND LIBRARIES

by

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Evaluation of less quantitative services offered by libraries has long been a concern of many. In its Guidelines of Public Library Service in Rhode Island the Committee on Standards for Public Libraries of the Rhode Island Library Association includes "Evaluation of Services." The first guideline under this section requests "library literature be reviewed for previous and on-going efforts to measure effectiveness of service" and cites Ernest R. DeProspo's Performance Measures for Public Libraries as an example of the type of measure intended. About the same time the Urban Institute and the International City Management Association, in Measuring the Effectiveness of Basic Municipal Services, suggested the DeProspo book as one method of measuring the effectiveness of library services. With the publication of the relatively easy-to-follow Instructional Manual by Altman/DeProspo[1] the Rhode Island Department of State Library Services encouraged libraries in the state to participate in a joint effort to measure services. A committee of department personnel and librarians in the state coordinated the activity.

During a two week period between late November and mid-December, 1977, libraries in 23 of the 39 cities and towns in the state participated in the performance survey. Before their measurement day, the libraries involved met for a training workshop, and again in January to look at results.

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[1]Altman, Ellen. A data gathering and instructional manual for performance measures in public libraries, by Ellen Altman, Ernest R. DeProspo, Philip M. Clark & Ellen Connor Clark. Chicago, Celadon Press, 1976.

Individual library staffs were interested in the survey and in the results. There was definite agreement that the survey, especially the tabulation, took more time than had been expected, and that many portions of the survey needed to be modified for use by small libraries. (All but one of the libraries are in cities and towns with less than 100,000 population.)

Included in DeProspo's Performance Measures for Public Libraries is information from libraries participating in earlier measurement. These figures have been used for comparative purposes throughout this paper. DeProspo, however, selected 20 libraries with budgets ranging from $100,000 to $3,499,999. Only 10 of the 23 libraries participating in the Rhode Island survey had budgets over $100,000. The statistics produced by smaller libraries will be less valid because of the sample size.

Although each library still has interpretation to be done, some changes were immediately identified. One busy branch in a commercial area was made aware that use of its fiction collection is more than previously thought, and expects to increase buying in this area. A regional library emphasized its role in backing up local periodical collections, and is adding titles, especially those included in indexes already owned. Larger libraries saw that quiet out-of-the-way study areas are most likely to be used. Many libraries commented on the value of statistics identifying use of materials inside the building, often equal to or exceeding circulation outside the building.

The user ticket and its tabulation proved the most useful section of the survey to most libraries. The committee added a line to the ticket identifying the town in which the user lived. In addition, Portsmouth added space for information on the voting district of the user. The voting district with the lowest income had users equal to five of the other seven districts.

All libraries have nonresident usage, the percentage tending to be higher in the smaller libraries. The range fell between 6% and 38%, with a median of 12%. Most libraries had users from several adjacent towns; usage appeared to be dependent on convenience of location with no correlation with size of library or town. No way was provided to identify those users who work or go to school in a town.

The actual number of users who entered the library on the measured day varied widely. This variance did not correlate as well as would be expected with size of library. Within libraries in towns with populations between 10,000 and 100,000, the number of users varied from 41 to 589. In the same libraries, the number of persons who borrowed books was much lower, ranging from 17 to 248. Materials used inside these libraries varied from 19 to 573 items, while outside circulation was 46 to 795 items. The actual numbers of persons entering the building (as opposed to the more traditional measure of materials leaving the building) or the measure of materials used inside, combined with those taken out indicate a use of the library significantly higher than that indicated by circulation figures alone.

The proportion of male users ranged from 16% to 65%, with the heavier percentage of female constituents in smaller and less urban libraries. (DeProspo's larger libraries found 36% to 60% male users.) Full time students made up 16 to 54 percent of the users. The majority fell between 30 to 48 percent. (DeProspo found 28 to 57%, with no differentiation between full and part time students.) In the full-time category, elementary school students predominated in eleven libraries and high school students in six libraries. Junior high students were most numerous in two libraries and nursery school students in one library which

had a preschool program scheduled. (High school students were the heaviest users in the libraries DePropsp studied.)

Non-student use varied from 19 to 64%, with no apparent pattern. The occupation most heavily respresented was housewife/mother in eight libraries; professional and technical in eight libraries; craftsmen, foremen, and operatives in three libraries, retired persons in two libraries, and clerical in one library. (The "small" libraries in DeProspo's sample found most users in the housewife/mother category.) Identifiable unemployed persons among users were few, ranging from none to 23 in Providence, but several libraries felt both retired and unemployed persons were heavily represented in the "no response" category. (No response was the most common answer for "occupation" in three libraries.)

The length of each user's stay was measured, these periods tallied, and the total divided by the number of hours the library was open to calculate "effective user hours." The "effective user hours" varied widely, although the number correlated roughly with the capacity of an individual library to accommodate extended stays. The range was from 1.7 effective user hours to 73.62, with larger libraries generally having larger numbers. Some libraries noted retired persons stayed longer than other categories. More than one library mentioned the effect limited space had on the length of stay, and the widespread tendency among library patrons to use circulating rather than reference materials.

Less than half of the persons who came into the library asked for assistance. Percentages ranged from 27 to 51. Most persons received the materials they wanted, with the percentage of satisfied persons ranging from 44 to 93. Asked if they received the service they expected, an even more favorable response resulted (78% to 100%). This question may, therefore, elicit a favorable response

from some persons because they did not expect to find the materials they wanted (or it may seem less impolite to say one failed to receive specific materials than to generally reflect on library service.) At least one library used the dissatisfaction with materials by specific groups as a buying guide.

Informational requests were asked more often by adults than by students. Adults asked from 25 to 74% of all questions. The breakdown of informational requests by type was subjective at best, and the results less reliable than one might wish. Nevertheless, results often pointed up the need for additional directional signs. Directional questions accounted for 10% to 86% of the questions asked, with most libraries under 45%. One of the two libraries with very high directional questions had just shifted many items, the other appeared complacent about service. (In smaller libraries DeProspo found directional questions formed 10 to 80% of the total questions asked.) Smaller libraries have questions asked of all staff members, underscoring the desirability of continuing reference/information source workshops for nonprofessional staff assigned to public areas. One larger library was made aware that it did not promote its telephone reference service sufficiently when only 9.5% of the questions in the reference area were by telephone.

Availability of materials was the most controversial factor measured. At least one library felt it was the most valuable measurement, because most other items vary so much from day to day. Generally there seemed to be an underlying fear of the results, especially of the evaluation from the American Book Publishing Record sample. The actual number of titles held varied from 4 in two libraries to 137 titles at Providence. This indicated a probability of ownership ranging up to .267, with most libraries between .05 and .08. (The twenty public libraries surveyed by DeProspo had a range of .08 to .58.) Because of the division of the state into regions, and the ease of access through the interlibrary loan/delivery

network on a regional and statewide basis, the number of titles was also calculated for each regional interrelated library system (participating libraries only) and for the state as a whole.

TABLE I

AMERICAN BOOK PUBLISHING RECORD PROBABILITY SAMPLE

	Number of Titles Owned	Probability of Ownership
Island System	89	.173
Northern System	104	.203
South County System	58	.112
Western System	78	.151
Providence System	137	.267
Statewide	194	.378

The general opinion among the librarians was that comparison with a standardized, selective list such as the Public Library Catalog might be more useful.

Periodical availability also ranged over a wide spectrum, from .006 to .372. (DeProspo's sample from larger libraries ranged from .100 to .950.) Many libraries owned a large percentage of the Readers' Guide titles. Some libraries owned indexes from which they had only a very small availability. This fact should be coupled with the recognition that such an index is primarily useful for inter-library loan purposes.

The periodical availability was also figured on a regional and on a statewide basis (for participating libraries only). Some gauge of the relative resources of the participating libraries is provided by the Island Interrelated Library System's union list of serials. That region as a whole owns

153 of the 320 periodical titles, for an availability rate of .478.

TABLE II

PERIODICAL AVAILABILITY SAMPLE

	Number of Titles Owned	Probability of Ownership
Island System	53	.166
Northern System	62	.194
South County System	47	.147
Western System	76	.238
Providence System	119	.372
Statewide	128	.400

Most librarians were more interested in results obtained from the measurement from their own collection than in the samples from periodical indexes or the American Book Publishing Record. Overall availability ranged from 56% to 86% (against DeProspo's 58% to 89%). Availability for 72% of the libraries was lower for fiction than for non-fiction. Seventy-eight percent of the libraries found juvenile titles less available than adult. Some libraries correlated the juvenile/adult and non-fiction/fiction proportions of the title availability sample with circulation statistics. Some local libraries felt that a high availability rate on older materials indicated a need for weeding. High availability in both literature and history areas were felt necessary in several libraries to meet a high, although uneven, demand for these materials by students. Juvenile titles often represented a higher portion of the circulation than of the collection. It was felt that specific titles were less often needed in this area, however, offsetting the apparent imbalance. Information collected in this area has already been used in an analysis of acquisition policy by several libraries.

Median age of the collection was in the 1960s for all libraries, ranging from 1956/60 to 1968/72. It was generally felt that the regional libraries and the Principal Public Library (Providence) should provide older materials while the smaller libraries were free to weed out much of the little used older items. Larger collections tended to be newer, but the smaller libraries were more aware of a need to weed. Several libraries related the availability of state monies in the last 10 years to the increased availability of materials for that period. More than one library felt the age of the library affected the age of the current collection.

For libraries in towns with populations of 10,000 to 100,000, use of the library materials inside the building ranged from 19 items to 573 items. This compares to an outside circulation for the same libraries of 46 to 795 items. The outside circulation combined with the number of persons taking books resulted in an average circulation per borrower of 1.8 to 3.63, with most libraries circulating between 2 and 3 books per borrower and no correlation by size of library.

TABLE III

	Users	Borrowers	In-person Questions	In-library Circulation
Library A	117	46	14	19
Library B	134	32	22	143
Library C	149	97	47	112
Library D	470	130	82	270
Library E	589	248	349	523

Why, when combining these measurements, do some libraries make contact with almost

every patron, either to circulate a book, or answer some type of question, while other libraries appear to make contact with less than half of the persons coming into the building? Is the difference accounted for entirely by in-library circulation and programs? How does a high in-library circulation affect staffing needs? Certainly there are large numbers of users who do not appear in traditional statistics.

Equipment utilization percentages seem rather low for all libraries, ranging from .02 to .53 (after eliminating one which was 0 and one which was 1.0). DeProspo suggests that any type of equipment with a use under .25 should result in consideration of more effective use of the space, or use of the equipment elsewhere. He also emphasizes looking at use during peak periods, and correlating equipment use with staff assignments. One large library discovered how little one entrance is used, while another library decided to remove some chairs for the needed space. Some libraries felt there was no way to measure some legitimate use: persons sitting on the floor, or standing in line to use a copying machine, for instance. Several libraries mentioned the small measured use of the card catalog.

As would be expected, most libraries found heavy use immediately after school. Other peak periods were the first and last hours of operation. South Kingstown found heavy use during the lunch hour for the buildings that were open. It plans to expand hours to cover the noon hour elsewhere in the system.

One of the measurements was of resources available to patrons in the form of staff actually available to serve them. The number of persons assigned to public service areas was combined with the number actually available and not assisting another patron. Personnel assigned/available factors were usually between .8 and .94, with the utilization factor for those assisting clustering

around .5 to .8. One library was aware that staff was heavily utilized, and that patrons often found information themselves because the staff was occupied with other patrons. Another librarian felt that small changes in staff schedules resulting from the survey had brought about improvement of service at peak periods. This was considered the most important insight gained from the survey by this library.

The user ticket included a provision for additional comments. Relatively few persons commented at all, and of these most were favorable. Favorable comments varied from 2% to 18% of all users; while unfavorable comments ranged from none to 8%. Several libraries had comments indicating the need for a quiet area for patron use. Many found favorable comments about staff and services. One library just beginning a building program found two favorable comments about the building now used. In some libraries parking problems were mentioned. Several comments indicated users did not know the purpose of the survey, feared cuts in funding were being considered, or that loss of library services was imminent. One library is moving its copy machine because of comments about noise. Other users had suggestions for collection development, signs, a bubbler, or for more evening hours. One Pawtucket user said "You're all so hip."

The overall value of the survey to individual libraries, regions, and the state is limited to the extent the findings are actually used for planning.

Participating libraries were:

PROVIDENCE	Providence Public Library
ISLAND	Barrington Public Library Rogers Free Library (Bristol) Middletown Free Library Newport Public Library Portsmouth Free Public Library Essex Public Library (Tiverton) George Hail Free Library (Warren)
NORTHERN	Central Falls Free Public Library Edward J. Hayden Public Library (Cumberland) Weaver Memorial Library (East Providence) Harmony Public Library (Glocester) Marian J. Mohr Public Library (Johnston) Lincoln Public Library North Providence Union Free Library (North Providence) Pawtucket Public Library East Smithfield Public Library (Smithfield) Greenville Public Library (Smithfield) Woonsocket Harris Public Library
WESTERN	Auburn Branch, Cranston Public Library Warwick Public Library
SOUTH COUNTY	Cross Mills Public Library (Charlestown) South Kingstown Public Library System Westerly Public Library